

CLAIMS

1. (Previously Presented) A conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting means for imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in said shared virtual space, said virtual mobile telephone being usable within said shared virtual space;

determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated said call from a telephone in said shared virtual space, (2) from a telephone in another virtual space, or (3) from a telephone in the real world; and

connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by said determination means.

2. (Previously Presented) The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein, if the determination means determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in the real world, said connecting means establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

3. (Previously Presented) The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein, if the determination means determines that said calling party originated said call

from said telephone in said another virtual space, said connecting means establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

4. (Previously Presented) The conversation support system according to claim 1, wherein said connecting means receives said call from said telephone in the real world or a virtual telephone in said another virtual space and connects the received call to a virtual mobile telephone of a called avatar in said shared virtual space.

5. (Previously Presented) A conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting means for imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determination means for determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party originated said call (1) from a telephone in said shared virtual space, (2) from a telephone in another virtual space, or (3) from a telephone in the real world; and

connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by said determination means.

6. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 5, wherein, if the determination means determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in the real world, said connecting means establishes a connection with

said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

7. (Previously Presented): The conversation support system according to claim 5, wherein, if the determination means determines that said caller originated said call from said telephone in said another virtual space, said connecting means establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

8. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in said shared virtual space, said virtual mobile telephone being usable within said shared virtual space;

determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated said call from a telephone in said shared virtual space, (2) from a telephone in another virtual space, or (3) from a telephone in the real world; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

9. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, wherein, if the determining step determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in the real world, said connecting step establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

10. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, wherein, if said determining step determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in said another virtual space, said connecting step establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

11. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 8, further comprising:

receiving a call from said telephone in the real world or said telephone in said another virtual space;

determining whether said call is directed to an avatar existing in said shared virtual space; and

if said determining step determines that said call is directed to said avatar existing in said shared virtual space, connecting said call to a virtual telephone of said avatar.

12. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party originated said call from a telephone in said shared virtual space, (2) from a telephone in another virtual space, or (3) from a telephone in the real world; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

13. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 12, wherein, if the determining step determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in the real world, said connecting step establishes a connection with said calling party through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

14. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 12, wherein, if the determining step determines that said calling party originated said call from said telephone in said another virtual space, said connecting step establishes a connection with said telephone in said another virtual space or executes message transfer.

15. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:
receiving a request for sending a message from said avatar;
determining whether a destination of said message exists in the real world; and
executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by the determining step.

16. (Previously Presented): The conversation support method according to claim 15, wherein, if said destination of said message is found in the real world, said step of executing connection processing establishes a connection with said destination through a public telephone network in the real world or executes message transfer.

17. (Previously Presented): A conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising:

receiving a request for sending a message from a telephone of a user in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world, wherein the user is not logged into the shared virtual space;

determining whether a destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space; and

if said determining step determines that the destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space, sending said message to said avatar.

18. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer-readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space;

imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to said shared virtual space at a predetermined place;

determining, in response to a call to said virtual public telephone, whether a calling party originated said call from a telephone in said shared virtual space, (2) from a telephone in another virtual space, or (3) from a telephone in the real world; and

executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in said determination step.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for sending a message from said avatar;
determining whether a destination of said message exists in the real world; and
executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made in the determining step.

21. (Previously Presented): A program storage medium storing a computer program in a computer readable form for executing processing on a computer system to support a virtual conversation in which a plurality of users can participate in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, said computer program comprising the steps of:

receiving a request for sending a message from a telephone of a user in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world, wherein the user is not logged into the shared virtual space;

determining whether a destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space;
and

if said determining step determines that the destination of said message exists in said shared virtual space, sending said message to an avatar.